

## Testimony Concerning HB6187 & SB1128

Wednesday, April 1, 2015

From: Dottie B. Leighton

I would like to thank the Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to express my support of HB6187 (Desmond's Law) and SB1128.

As you may already suspect, I am an animal lover. Raised in a family of animal lovers, I have had pets for my entire life. I believe that one of my sole purposes in this life is to adopt dogs that have been abandoned, abused, or otherwise left homeless. As with many animal lovers – especially those of us without *human* children – my animals *are* my children. I do not pretend to be unique as compared with others from whom you are receiving testimony. And while there is tremendous research on the health benefits of owning a pet, and literature published on the improvement in health outcomes with regard to pet therapy for hospitalized individuals, my testimony today will go beyond the “nice” stuff. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the very real, and very dangerous, consequences of ignoring animal rights and continuing to allow their lives to be disposable and their abusers to go free by way of “Accelerated Rehabilitation.”

The act of animal abuse is pathologic. Whether sociopathic or psychopathic, there is absolutely, positively nothing normal or healthy about the mind of a person who can make the conscious decision to light a kitten on fire or cut off a dog's feet. I ask you, for just 10 seconds, to close your eyes and picture that act. I don't know about you, but I feel sick to my stomach at the mere thought of it. Animal abuse, especially prior to adulthood, is a huge red flag for future dangerous behaviors. Abuse of a defenseless animal provides the abuser with a sense of accomplishment because the animal usually cannot fight back. It also sets a bar that the abuser then wants to exceed the next time. At some point, the violence turns toward people.

Animal abuse is linked directly to illnesses such as Conduct Disorder and Oppositional-Defiant Disorder. History of animal abuse is often found in murderers, rapists, and other violent criminals. If you are not yet convinced, please consider these statistics from published studies:

- As many as 100% of sexual homicide offenders had a history of cruelty toward animals
- 85% of battered women in shelters report a history of animal cruelty in their homes
- 80% of child abuse cases also involve animal abuse in the home
- 70% of animal abusers have committed at least one other serious crime
- 63% of men who committed aggressive crimes admit that they have also abused animals
- 48% of rapists and 30% of child molesters committed animal abuse as children
- Male animal abusers are 5 times more likely to commit violence against humans

The issue of animal cruelty – of abused animals deserving legal representation, and of perpetrators **not** deserving accelerated rehabilitation – is more than just bleeding heart puppy-lovers wanting our pets to be protected. It represents a serious problem with major societal impact at a global level that will only escalate if the punishment is not severe. It starts with crimes against animals. It ends with crimes against humans.

I strongly implore you to pass HB6187 (Desmond's Law) and SB1128. If you don't want to do it for the animals, then do it for your children, your wives, your mothers, your neighbors, and maybe even yourself. Today, a kid is torturing a cat. Tomorrow, that same kid may be torturing someone you love.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify.

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